



Montgomery County Council

For Immediate Release

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Remarks by Council President Steve Silverman Before 2003 Legislative Breakfast of the Committee for Montgomery

When the national cemetery at Gettysburg was dedicated in 1863, the principal orator of the day, Edward Everett, spoke for several hours. Abraham Lincoln, asked to share a few words, offered 254 of them.

Not only are those 254 words perhaps the best known in the world, but they offer a yardstick against which any elected official's speechifying can be compared. Now I did not know Abe Lincoln and I am no Abe Lincoln, but I'm going to try and come as close as I can to his 254 words, so here goes...

Our County and State face enormous challenges.

Education. Our future depends on our investment in educating our children. We must fully fund the Thornton Commission recommendations that we fought so hard to make right and fair. This is just as important to the child in Baltimore or Anne Arundel County as it is to the child in our schools. I can give the Governor 74 million reasons in his home County alone to fully fund Thornton. It's not just a Montgomery County issue; it's an all counties issue.

We have labored mightily to reduce class size, expand full-day kindergarten, and sharpen math and reading skills—and those efforts are paying off. But they can only be sustained if we have good facilities in which to learn. Our list of eligible school construction projects totals \$60 million... \$20 million in Anne Arundel, \$30 million in Baltimore County, \$47 million in Frederick. It's not just a Montgomery County issue; it's an all counties issue.

At the other end of the education spectrum, the historic investments of Thornton will not fulfill their potential unless kids can go to college.

For a huge number here that means Montgomery College. Within two years of high school graduation, 40 percent of our high school graduates enroll at Montgomery College.

If the State shortchanges our community colleges by pricing would-be students out of a degree or impacting the quality of their instruction, we may not be able to make up the entire shortfall. Neither will other counties. It's not just a Montgomery County issue; it's an all counties issue.

Traffic congestion. It's stealing the quality of life from our residents and economic opportunities from our businesses. Yet a recent study showed that Maryland spends

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substantially less money per registered vehicle on highways than any of our closer neighbors. I don't want our State near the bottom in any category—except maybe crime!

Our County's 10-year transportation blueprint alone requires \$6 billion in State and federal monies—much more than the Hellmann Commission has focused on—just to meet our pressing needs. We need to think bigger if we are to fund the big-ticket items such as the ICC, the Inner Purple Line, and Corridor Cities Transitway as well as the basic bread-and-butter road and transit needs that are ready to go—like interchanges at Rockville Pike and Montrose Road, and Georgia and Randolph. But it's not just us. It's major improvements to Route 301 in Prince George's and Charles Counties; it's widening Route 32 in Howard County. It's not just a Montgomery County issue; it's an all counties issue.

So, what about funding, you say. Well, there are many sound and honest proposals on the table to address our State fiscal challenges. But there's one proposal that should be taken off the table—any expansion of legalized gambling.

Let's be honest. Slots and casinos would be dead-on-arrival in a good economy—and rightly so. But the current downturn in the economy threatens to replace good fiscal policy with ill-advised, profound, and irrevocable decisions about how to fund our needs.

As a recent study of the State's lottery showed, areas in the State that sell the most lottery tickets per person, many of them in Prince George's County and Baltimore, but also in rural areas, have more minority residents, more poverty, and more high school dropouts than anywhere else.

Like the lottery, slots will be nothing more than a tax on poor and working families in Maryland. Slots will be a tax on our minority community.

Instead of building on the genius and talents and energies of Marylanders seeking to build a better future, slots feed on the message of “get rich quick” at the expense of hard work, thrift, and responsibility. They send exactly the wrong message to our young people.

We want our children to live in a state that is known for its scientists and teachers, not its card dealers.

Our County Executive has already outlined his opposition to slots. Although the County Council is currently on recess, I intend to introduce a resolution on our first day back, January 13, asking the Council to join him in urging the State to find a solid solution for our long-term fiscal future, not the siren song of slots and casinos. Let's all work together for a better Maryland.

Brevity is indeed a hard road to travel. And, since I've already exceeded Mr. Lincoln's address by a few hundred words, I'll sit down.

Thanks to the Committee for Montgomery for organizing this event and for all the hard work you do. Thank you.

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